

## VIRGINIA AGRICULTURAL COUNCIL PREPROPOSAL FORM

### **Title: Farm Incubator Program**

The Catawba Sustainability Center's goals are: 1) to provide two-to-three year, low cost land use agreements for Beginning Farmers, and 2) to ensure that the Beginning Farmers receive mentoring and/or educational activities which will allow the individuals to develop a successful/ profitable agricultural business. By removing the primary economic barriers i.e.(land/equipment) the Catawba Sustainability Center can help to ensure that Beginning Farmers are better prepared to enter into a new agricultural business venture when they leave the Center. By allowing Beginning Farmers to 1) develop a customer base for their agricultural products and 2) build financial capital, these Beginning Farmers will have a better chance of success when they transition from the Catawba Sustainability Center to their own operation.

The Catawba Sustainability Center currently has several Beginning Farmers, who have established new vegetable production enterprises. Currently, the vegetables are grown on open ground at the Center; however, many successful commercial vegetable producers utilize plasticulture techniques that the Center would like to incorporate/demonstrate to the Beginning Farmers. Weed control and watering are time consuming activities in vegetable production. Historically, some of the growers at Catawba have gotten frustrated trying to control weeds and several producers have abandoned their plots. The Center would like to be able to provide Beginning Farmers with biodegradable plastic and drip tape for their vegetable enterprises in order to encourage the adaption of the technology. Additionally, the vegetable plots have been damaged by groundhogs at various times. The Catawba Center would like to install a permanent perimeter fence around the vegetable plots in order to protect the growers' investment.

With a greater emphasis placed on the identified need for agricultural opportunities for veterans, we are actively recruiting veterans as part of this program. The Catawba Center currently has one veteran/beginning farmer enrolled in our program.

### **Include a brief explanation of the Economic impact the project would have on Virginia agriculture.**

The primary economic goal of this project would be to allow individuals to try and establish an economically viable agricultural enterprise by utilizing plasticulture growing techniques. By removing the primary economic barriers (land/equipment) we can develop individuals to successfully enter into an aging Virginia agricultural industry. Depending on the vegetables grown, the marketing system developed, and the production skills of the grower it is possible to develop a profitable business in the local food movement. A two-three agreement will provide the economic stability necessary for a new grower to begin establishing a market base for local produce and identify and specify products that will be most viable and valuable.

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INVESTIGATOR(S)\* Josh Nease & Andy Seibel

DURATION (years) one two X

BUDGET (yr. one) \$4,000 (total) \$8000

\*One pre-proposal per PI please

| COMMODITY GROUPS  | CHECK <u>ONE</u> GROUP THAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR PROJECT |
|---|---|
| Aquaculture   |   |
| Fruit/Wine  |   |
| Livestock<br>Dairy<br>Poultry<br>Hogs<br>Beef<br>Sheep<br>Goats<br>Horses |   |
| Nursery/ Forestry   |   |
| Row Crops   |   |
| Turf/Seed   |   |
| Vegetable   |   |
| Educational   | X   |
| Miscellaneous Agriculture   |   |